

BATTING CAGES AND PITCHING MACHINES BEST PRACTICES

Park Districts often own and operate batting cages and pitching machines within their parks. Some of these facilities are located outdoors, while others are found inside recreation centers. Some cages and machines are operated commercially for profit, while others are used privately by instructors. In some cases, a Park District may own a batting cage or pitching machine but lease its operations to a private operator.

There are inherent risks to both employees and the public when owning or operating a batting cage and/or pitching machine. The information below aims to help reduce the potential for injuries.

GENERAL RULES FOR ALL BATTING CAGES

CAGE CAPACITY: Only two people are allowed inside the cage at a time: the batter and the pitching machine operator.

SUPERVISOR PRESENCE: The batting cage supervisor must always be present whenever the cage is in use.

SUPERVISION:

The batting cage supervisor is responsible for overseeing the batter inside the cage. The supervisor must choose another adult or responsible teen to supervise home plate and on-deck batters while assisting the batter in the cage.

HELMET REQUIREMENT: All batters must wear a helmet at all times while in the cage.

SAFETY NETS: The appropriate softball or baseball safety net must be used, and the pitching machine operator must remain behind the net at all times.

BALL RETRIEVAL: Batters are NEVER allowed to go behind the safety net to retrieve or pick up balls. Only the pitching machine operator is permitted to go behind the net.

SPECTATOR DISTANCE: Spectators must remain at least 3 feet away from the walls of the batting cage.

ON-DECK BATTERS: On-deck batters may not hold bats in their hands. All bats must be kept inside the cage.

NETTING CARE: No one is allowed to pull, hang on, put their hands into, or otherwise damage the batting cage netting.

EQUIPMENT RETURN: All equipment must be returned to its proper place after use unless the next user needs to use the same equipment.

GENERAL RULES FOR BALLFIELD BATTING CAGES

HELMET USE: Batters must wear a league-approved helmet at all times.

SUPERVISION: Two managers or coaches are required to be present when using the batting cage. One adult manager or coach must stay outside the cage to supervise the players.

PITCHING: Only adult managers or coaches are permitted to pitch in the cages. No players are allowed to pitch.

PITCHING SAFETY: Pitchers must always stand behind the league-provided L Screen while pitching.

BALL PICK-UP: During ball pick-up, up to four players may assist with gathering balls.

DISTANCE FROM CAGE: Teammates and spectators must stay at least 3 feet away from the cage screens.

PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES: Hitting or pitching into the exterior of the cages is not allowed, including the use of whiffle balls, heavy balls, baseballs, etc.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS: Use common sense at all times, including refraining from climbing on the cages.

PROPER USE: Do not use the cages for pitching, catching, or fielding.

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OUR PROMISE

Your IPARKS membership makes it easy for you to provide safe places to play, relax, and enjoy. By making safety a priority, we empower you to improve upon best practices and work in collaboration with your fellow members to protect your district, assets, and those you serve.

SAFE PARKING AND STORAGE OF VEHICLES

By: IPARKS Risk Services Team

Ensuring the safe parking and proper storage of vehicles is essential to maintaining a secure transportation environment and protecting both the vehicles and personnel. As entities manage a fleet of vehicles for various transport operations, it is important to adhere to safety guidelines for parking and storing vehicles correctly. Here are key practices to promote safe parking and storage:

DESIGNATED PARKING AREAS

Designate specific parking areas for different types of vehicles to ensure organized parking and easy access for maintenance and inspection.

SECURE PARKING FACILITIES

Park vehicles in secure facilities equipped with adequate lighting, surveillance cameras, and controlled access to prevent theft and vandalism.

PROPERLY PARK VEHICLES

Ensure vehicles are parked in designated spaces with sufficient clearance around them to avoid obstruction of emergency exits and walkways.

UTILIZE WHEEL CHOCKS

Use wheel chocks when parking on inclines or uneven surfaces to prevent unintended movement of the vehicle.

HANDBRAKE AND GEAR SHIFT

To prevent accidental rolling, engage the handbrake and shift vehicles into the park or neutral position before turning off the engine.



VEHICLE INSPECTION

Conduct routine inspections of parked vehicles for leaks, tire pressure, fluid levels, and any signs of damage or malfunction.

PROHIBITED PARKING AREAS

Clearly mark and restrict parking in areas designated as no-parking zones such as fire lanes, emergency exits, and loading/unloading areas.

STORING HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

If storing vehicles with hazardous materials, ensure compliance with regulations for proper containment, labeling, and storage practices.

BATTERY MAINTENANCE

Disconnect the battery or use a maintenance charger for long-term storage to prevent battery drain and ensure readiness for use.

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

Display emergency contact information inside each vehicle for quick access in case of emergencies or maintenance needs.

By following these safety practices for parking and storage of vehicles, you can maintain a secure transportation fleet and contribute to overall safety in your operations. Your attention to these guidelines is crucial for the well-being of your vehicles and personnel.

IPARKS POWER GRANT

Please visit the IPARKS website at www.iparks.org and apply for the **IPARKS Power Grant**. The amount awarded to each member varies based on annual contribution to the IPARKS program: \$500 for members paying up to \$5,000, \$1,000 for members paying \$5,000 to \$25,000 and \$1,500 for members paying over \$25,000 annually.

SIDEWALK/PAVEMENT LIABILITY

By: IPARKS Risk Services Team

The weather in the Midwest can be harsh on sidewalks due to extreme temperature fluctuations, including snow, ice, and rain. Implementing a solid sidewalk maintenance program and conducting regular inspections can help prevent injuries and reduce liability exposure.

CONTROL MEASURES

Regular inspections are crucial. Start with a comprehensive benchmark inspection, then conduct periodic zone inspections focusing on detailed evaluations (measurements of slopes, cement separations, percentage of spalling, etc.). Utilize walking audits, take photos/videos, and spot inspections based on individual reports. Establish a process to ensure routine documented sidewalk inspections and develop training programs to ensure sidewalk inspectors know:

- What to look for regarding sidewalk defects
 - How to document the inspection
 - How to document the sidewalk condition at the time of the inspection
 - How to warn the public of sidewalk areas needing repairs
- How to ensure the inspection report is submitted and entered into the repair process

CONCERNS/INJURIES

Create a formal procedure for reporting and addressing individual concerns or injuries. Encourage easy reporting methods, document all concerns, and investigate promptly. If injuries are involved, consult with an attorney before making repairs.



Sidewalk in need of repair

PRIORITIZATION

Do not neglect maintenance issues. Allocate resources efficiently, addressing high-use areas, and maintenance decisions based on urgency.

FIXING SIDEWALKS:

- Temporary Solutions: Signage, cold patching, grinding, jacking (mud or polly), rubber pavers (near trees where roots are an issue)
- Long-Term Solutions: Replacement, overlays, grinding, jacking (mud or polly), rubber pavers (near trees where roots are an issue)
- Seasonal: Abutting property owners can handle snow/ice removal and maintenance of brush/weeds

The most observed issue with sidewalks is the change in elevation and weed overgrowth. Sidewalks should be inspected to ensure weeds are removed due to the trip hazard and to ensure there is not a change in elevation greater than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch without a bevel or up to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch with a 2:1 bevel that extends the entire vertical surface.

It is critical that the inspections be done correctly; therefore, only trained individuals should be allowed to conduct them. Using a qualified contractor ensures that you will receive expert advice and professional repairs and installation.

WORKPLACE SAFETY:

GENERAL AWARENESS

By: IPARKS Risk Services Team

HOUSEKEEPING & COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS

Maintaining good housekeeping in offices is essential for ensuring a safe work environment and should be standard practice. Simple work habits can help minimize injuries and reduce the risk of fires caused by untidy conditions. Items such as papers, file folders, take-out containers, rugs, and upholstered furniture are all combustible materials.

Keep personal workspaces, desks, and the general work area tidy and orderly. Here are some guidelines to follow for a clean and organized workspace:

- Always keep file, desk, and table drawers closed when not in use, and never open more than one file drawer at a time.
- Avoid stacking items on top of lockers, file cabinets, bookcases, or other high surfaces.
- Ensure that the blade on paper cutters is locked and secured when not in use.
- Store workstation supplies carefully to minimize the risk of accidental punctures or cuts.
- Place heavy items on the bottom shelf, lighter items on top, and keep frequently used items at a height between your shoulders and knees.
- Secure all cabinets that are 5 feet or higher to prevent tipping.



SLIP, TRIP, AND FALL PREVENTION

Falls are the most common accident in the office. Here are some important safety tips to help prevent them:

- Be mindful of changes in elevation and variations in walking surfaces.
- Walk, don't run.
- Always use handrails on stairways.
- Always use a ladder or step stool; do not use chairs or climb on work surfaces or counters.
- Correct, remove, or report unsafe conditions, such as electrical cords, frayed carpets, worn stairs, and other hazards that could lead to slips, trips, or falls.
- Report any lighting issues immediately.
- Report any hazardous floor conditions as soon as you notice them.
- Always wipe up spills immediately and use "wet floor" signs if necessary.
- Never run cords, cables, or hoses across high-traffic areas. Use cord protectors to secure them and tape them down if needed.
- Always close desk or cabinet drawers after use.
- Do not open more than one drawer at a time, especially on tall cabinets that could tip over.
- Report any hazards you encounter in stairwells or other areas of the building.

OFFICE ELECTRICAL SAFETY & FIRE SAFETY

Electricity is essential for the operations of a modern automated office; however, the electrical equipment used can be hazardous and may cause serious shock or burn injuries if not used or maintained properly.

SPACE HEATERS

- Obtain approval for space heaters from your supervisor. Ensure they are approved for commercial use, such as meeting Underwriters Laboratories (UL) standards.
- Space heaters must be equipped with an automatic shut-off mechanism to turn off the heater if it is tipped over.
- Keep space heaters at least three feet away from flammable or combustible materials.
- Never plug a space heater into an extension cord.

POWER CORDS

- Damaged or ungrounded cords pose a serious fire hazard and violate safety codes.
- Do not place electrical cords near radiators, space heaters, or other heat sources.
- Regularly examine electrical cords for signs of wear, fraying, or cracking.
- Never use a cord that feels hot or appears damaged in any way. Touching even a single exposed wire strand can result in an electric shock or burn.
- Do not overload electrical circuits.

EXTENSION CORDS & DAISY CHAINS

- Use extension cords only on a temporary basis; unplug and safely store them after every use. If an extension cord is necessary, do not use it for more than 90 days.
- Avoid creating “daisy chains” (plugging extension cords together).
- Ensure that extension cords are rated for their intended use, whether indoor or outdoor, and they meet or exceed the power requirements of the appliance or tool being used.
- Do not plug more than one device into an extension cord.

SPRINKLER HEADS

- Do not stack boxes or other items near sprinkler heads.
- Maintain an 18-inch clearance below sprinkler heads to ensure they function effectively.

APPLIANCES & EQUIPMENT

- Keep appliances such as coffee pots, toaster ovens, and microwaves in working order, and inspect them for signs of wear, heat, or fraying cords.
- Plug all electrical equipment into appropriate wall receptacles.
- Only use guarded fans in work areas.

ELECTRICAL PANELS

- Ensure that electrical panel doors are easily accessible and not blocked by furniture or clutter.
- Maintain a 36-inch clearance in front of all electrical panels.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS IN THE OFFICE

Employees in office environments typically have limited exposure to potentially hazardous materials or substances. However, several products can be hazardous, so it is important to be aware of them and know how to handle them safely. Some of these products include toner used in copy machines and common cleaning agents.

Here are some basic safe work practices to follow:

- Read Safety Data Sheets (SDS) before using any products.
- Do not use a chemical product unless its primary or secondary container is properly labeled, and the label is readable.
- Follow all safety policies and procedures regarding the use, storage, and disposal of hazardous materials.
- Report any hazardous conditions to a supervisor immediately.
- Use all required personal protective equipment whenever you are using or handling workplace chemicals.
- Request information and training from your supervisor if you are unsure about how to handle or use unfamiliar workplace chemicals.
- Store potentially poisonous solutions or items not intended for consumption in well-labeled containers and in a secure location within the office.
- Keep office cleaning supplies stored away from edible items on kitchen shelves.
- Store cleaning solvents and flammable liquids in appropriate containers or cabinets.

BY OBSERVING THESE PRACTICES, YOU CAN HELP ENSURE A SAFER OFFICE ENVIRONMENT.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOKS

BEST PRACTICES

By: IPARKS Risk Services Team

An employee handbook is a manual that outlines expectations for employees and what they can expect from the entity. Employee handbooks offer several benefits, including:

INFORMATION FOR NEW EMPLOYEES: They provide essential details that help new hires integrate into the organization.

REFERENCE FOR SEASONED EMPLOYEES: Handbooks serve as a resource for current employees to review policies and procedures.

FAIR TREATMENT: Handbooks ensure that all employees are treated equally in accordance with entity policies.

LEGAL PROTECTION: They help protect the entity from potential lawsuits by clearly outlining policies and procedures.

STANDARDIZATION: Handbooks explain employee expectations and the consequences for violating rules, promoting consistency within the organization.

TIME SAVINGS FOR MANAGEMENT: Documented rules and procedures save management time by reducing the need to repeatedly explain policies to multiple employees.

GUIDANCE FOR HUMAN RESOURCES: They serve as a reference manual for HR teams and managers.

REDUCED ONBOARDING TIME: By clarifying job responsibilities and performance expectations, handbooks help new employees get up to speed more quickly.

LEGAL COMPLIANCE: They assist in adhering to federal and state employment laws and can serve as a legal defense in case of employee lawsuits.

POLICY EXPLANATION: Handbooks clarify the organization's stance on issues such as favoritism, discrimination, harassment, and provide information on how to report any violations concerning these matters.

When developing an employee handbook, include only the policies and procedures that you actually follow. Use simple and straightforward language. The handbook should be reviewed annually to ensure that the policies and procedures remain relevant and up to date, particularly since laws can change. Additionally, have your handbook reviewed by an employment law attorney to ensure compliance with various employment laws that may apply to the entity.



The following is a list of suggested sections for your employee handbook:

INTRODUCTION: Welcome message, at-will employment statement, mission, vision, etc.

EMPLOYMENT POLICIES: ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity), termination, promotion, etc.

WORKPLACE CONDUCT: Ethics, complaint procedures, disciplinary action, harassment policy, drug-free workplace policy, etc.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS: Details of the employer-provided benefits package, COBRA (Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act), wellness programs, etc.

TIME AWAY FROM WORK: Policies regarding PTO (Paid Time Off), flextime, illness, lunch and breaks, jury duty, FMLA (Family and Medical Leave Act), bereavement, vacation, voting, etc.

INFORMATION & OFFICE SECURITY: Emergency action plans, facility access procedures, visitor policies, computer usage, email, voicemail, cell phone policies, etc.

GENERAL PRACTICES: Anti-discrimination policies, attendance requirements, background checks, usage of entity vehicles, entity credit cards, business expenses, conflict of interest guidelines, direct deposit instructions, dress code, employee fraternization policies, employee referral programs, improper payment or gifts, media relations, open door policy, performance evaluations, overtime policies, personnel records maintenance, etc.

APPENDIX: Required forms for the policies mentioned above, acknowledgments that require signatures, expense report forms, etc.

If you need a new employee handbook or want to update your existing one, Zywave simplifies the process. To get started, visit Member Benefits & Programs, Resource eLibrary, linked on the IPARKS website at the top and scroll down to Other Resources (Resource eLibrary).

From there, sign up or login and click on the HR Portal (Zywave). Click on "Handbooks" in the left navigation pane. Launch the Employee Handbook Builder, a user-friendly tool that allows you to easily create a comprehensive employee handbook or individual policies. This benefit is included with your IPARKS membership at no additional cost.

Next, review the list of highly recommended and discretionary policies to include in your handbook, or choose the individual policy you wish to create. The policies are tailored to specific states and cover various topics, including anti-harassment, overtime, drug-free workplace, and employee benefits. Once you've completed your handbook or policy, you (or your legal counsel, as recommended by IPARKS) will have the opportunity to review and edit it as often as necessary.

Consult your Risk Control Specialist with any questions you may have or to request an on-site visit. Please contact Jason Johnston at jjohnston@iparks.org





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If our mailing records need to be updated, please contact the IPARKS Service Center at (800) 748-0554, ext. 3136.
IPARKS newsletters are available for viewing and printing at www.iparks.org.

CONFERENCE RECAP

The IPARKS service team enjoyed seeing so many of our IPARKS members stop by the booth, as well as at our third annual Member Appreciation Reception, during this year's IAPD/IPRA Soaring to New Heights Convention. It was great to meet some new faces and catch up with familiar ones! We're proud to announce that over 100 attendees joined us at the reception this year. Thank you to those members who stopped by to help celebrate another successful year of IPARKS!



IPARKS is the risk management affinity partner of Illinois Association of Park Districts (IAPD), working to provide affordable, specialized coverage programs and valuable loss control resources for park districts, recreation and conservation districts, river conservancy districts, forest preserves and special recreation agencies.